



simple sophistication

A FEW FAVORITE
PIECES SET IN
AIRY SPACES
OFFER TIMELESS
ELEGANCE

BY BOB WILSON

As the 1990s wind down, it's as though a vigorous gust of fresh air were sweeping through our homes; more and more people are eliminating the clutter and replacing it with decorating schemes that take the rules of design seriously. This trend is exemplified in the three residences featured in this section—a gracious apartment in New York City, a tiny flat in Toronto, and a house in northern California. In each, the furnishings and finishes, selected with a keen eye and a sense of what best suits the occupants, offer a crisp, clean look that complements the architecture in which they are set. Color palettes are limited to a narrow range of hues that play up the twin essences of a comfortable room—space and light. In short, harmony reigns.



traditional flair

ALTHOUGH "ROMANTIC MINIMALISM" IS CURRENTLY BEING EXTOLLED AS A STYLE THAT is at once dramatic and novel, the look has been subscribed to for decades—if not centuries—as a reaction to recurring bouts of opulence. Indeed, after working with clients who insist on elaborate decorative schemes, many interior designers take refuge in their own spare, neutral-toned environments. New York City-based interior designer Sheila Bridges is one who does just that. Sticking to a few carefully selected objects seems to be Bridges' secret. "My approach is definitely 'less is more,'" she explains. When asked how this applies to her own apartment, a three-bedroom rental on the top floor of a 1901 landmark building in Harlem, she replies: "Because I work at home, and often specify dark colors and patterns when designing for clients, I wanted to withdraw from all that into a peaceful, soothing space."

When she found the apartment, though, it was anything but peaceful; in fact, in its last guise, it had been gussied up with dark-brown faux-wood finishes and wall-to-wall carpeting for an appearance as a set in a Spike Lee film, *Jungle Fever*. The bones of the place were good, though; only the wainscot paneling had sustained any

OPPOSITE: The unique mix of furnishings in Sheila Bridges' living room includes a pair of easy chairs bearing the classic Bridgewater profile plus a coffee table she made from a rosy slab of marble set onto a slender stainless-steel base. **ABOVE:** A textural rug made of seagrass creates a serene, but interesting, backdrop for the mismatched collection of seating options and unusual collectibles like an armillary sphere, which is used as a centerpiece. **TOP LEFT:** Glass-fronted cabinets display favorite pieces from Bridges' collection of Depression glass. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Accessories, discovered in antique



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY



LUXE MATERIALS
AND FLEA-MARKET
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TO THE CLASSIC
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noticeable damage. And, none of the striking architectural elements—fireplaces with charming mantels and tiled surrounds, moldings, leaded-glass-faced cabinets, and box-panel doors—had been removed; all of the original, traditional features remained intact in the apartment. Bridges' initial task upon moving in, therefore, was simple: to clean and lighten up the surfaces.

She painted the walls a warm, creamy off-white, took up the carpeting, and refinished the handsome pine-strip flooring that had lurked beneath. The color scheme for the apartment was inspired by a small Kandinsky watercolor that she loves; the pale blues, greens, and yellows echo throughout every room. Fabrics are all natural, low-maintenance cottons and cotton velvets, many of them dappled with motifs, such as twigs and leaves, that are drawn from nature. Furnishings and accessories were gathered from the various resources she taps when shopping for clients, both in Manhattan and places further afield, from upstate New York to Paris. "I call my style 'culturally classic,'" she says. "I like a mix of objects from different periods. Not everything has to match. I like old things and new things, and I believe they can work together if you think about how they will set each other off."

In Bridges' apartment everything has a certain place, and there is certainly a place for everything. Nothing is extraneous, "except maybe some of my Depression glass," she laughs. "I have so much of that from my grandmother and my mother and I don't know what to do with it all!"

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OPPOSITE: The lofty bedroom includes a classic iron bed, two small bedside tables gracefully covered with fabric, and traditional light fixtures. Since privacy isn't an issue, Bridges felt no need to dress the window; a simple pull shade blocks the sunlight. ABOVE: A contemporary photograph, entitled "Easter Sunday," by Harlem photographer Dani Sreele, hangs over a Colonial-blue armchair; Bridges bought the